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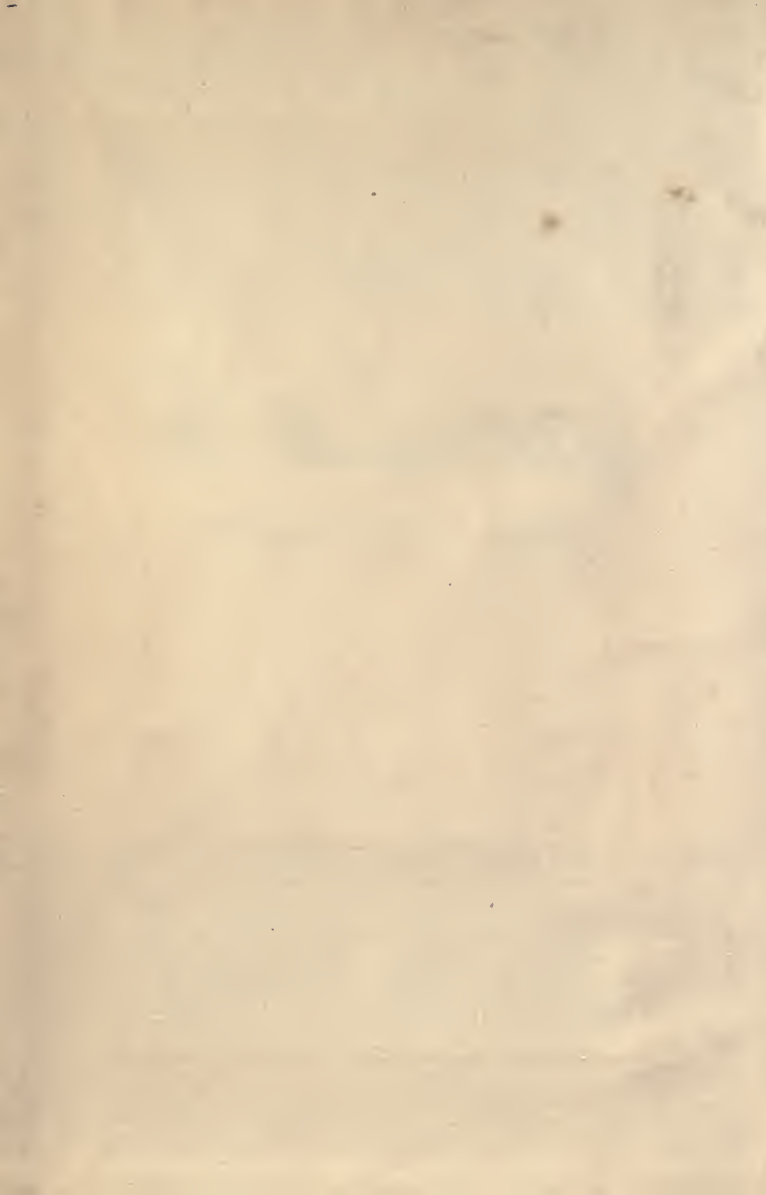
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New Series

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THE
MISANTHROPE.



JACKSON'S NOVELS

JAMES JACKSON.

7 Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C.

THE MISANTHROPE CORRECTED.

By MARMONTEL.

THERE is no correcting the natural disposition, they will tell me, and I agree to it; but among a thousand combined accidents which compose a character, what eye is sufficiently fine to distinguish that indelible characteristic? How many vices and irregularities are attributed to nature, which she never occasioned? Such is, in man, the hatred of mankind: it is a factitious character; a part which we take up out of whim, and maintain through habit; but in acting which, the soul is under restraint, from which she struggles to be delivered. What happened to the misanthrope, whom Molière has painted, is an instance of it; and we are now going to see how he was brought to himself again.

Alcestes, dissatisfied, as you know, with his mistress and his judges, detesting the city and the court, and resolved to fly mankind, retired very far from Paris, into the Voges, near Laval, on the banks of the Vologné. One of the pleasures of his retreat was to see around him the earth, cultivated and fertile, nourish a people who seemed to be happy. Alcestes felt an emotion mingled with joy, at the sight of his fellow-creatures rich by the labour of their own hands. "These people," said he, "are very happy in being yet half-savages; they would soon be corrupted if they were more civilized."

Walking in the fields, he accosts a labourer, ploughing and singing. "God preserve you, good man," said he to him; "you are very merry!" "According to custom," replied the villager. "I am very glad of it: it proves that you are content with your condition." "And well I may." "Are you married?" "Yes, thank Heaven." "Have you any children?" "I have five; I have lost one; but that loss may be repaired." "Is your wife young?" "Twenty-five." "Is she handsome?" "She is so to me; but she is better than handsome, she is good." "And you love her!" "Love her! who would not love her?" "She loves you too, without doubt?" "O, as to that, most heartily, and as well as before marriage?"

"You loved one another then before marriage?" "Or else should we have taken each other?" "And your children, do they come on well?" "Ah, that is a pleasure! The eldest is but five; he has more wit than his father already. And my two girls! they are charming. It would be a very great pity if they should want husbands! The youngest boy sucks still; but the little rogue will be a sturdy fellow. Would you believe it, he beats his sisters when they go to kiss their mother. He is afraid that they are coming to take the breast from him." "All this is very happy?" "Happy! I think so. You should see our joy when I return from work. You would think they had not seen me for a year: I know not which to listen to. My wife hangs upon my neck, my daughters jump into my arms, my eldest boy seizes me by the legs; not one of them neglects me, even to little Jackey himself, who, rolling on his mother's bed, stretches out his little hands to me; while I laugh, and cry, and kiss them; for all this moves me." "I believe it." "You ought to feel it, for to be sure you are a father." "I have not that happiness." "So much the worse: there is no other joy." "And how do you live?" "Very well; upon excellent bread, good milk, and the fruits of our orchard. My wife, with a little bacon, makes a supper of cabbage, of which the king himself might eat. Then we have the eggs of our fowls, and on Sundays we regale ourselves, and drink a cup of wine." "Yes, but when the year turns out bad?" "We are prepared for it, and live comfortably on what we have saved in a good one."

"Ay, but the rigour of the weather, the cold, the rain, the heats?" "We are accustomed to them; and if you know what pleasures we have in coming in the evening to breathe the fresh air after a summer's day; or, in winter to unnumb one's hands at a fire of good brush-wood, between one's wife and one's children! And then we sup heartily, and go to sleep; and do you think that we ever bestow a thought upon the bad weather! Sometimes my wife says to me, 'My good man, do you hear the wind and the storm? Ah, if you were now in the fields!'—'I am not there, I am with thee,' I tell her; and to assure her of it, I press her to my bosom. Ah, sir! there are many of the fine people who do not live so happy as we." "And the taxes?" "We pay them cheerfully: it must be so. All the country cannot be noble. The lord of the manor and the judge cannot come to labour. They supply our wants, we supply theirs: and every state of life, as it is said, has its troubles." "What equity?" said the Misanthrope. "There, now, in two words, is the whole economy of primitive society. O Nature! there is nothing just but thee: it is in thy uncultivated

simplicity that we find sound reason!—But in paying the tribute so well, do not you give room to be charged more heavily?" "We used to fear it formerly; but, thank God! the lord of the manor has freed us from that uneasiness. He performs the duty of our good king; he imposes, he receives himself, and, in cases of necessity, he makes the advances. He takes care of us, as if we were his children." "And who is this gallant man?" "The Viscount De Laval. He is well enough known; the whole country respects him." "Does he reside in his castle?" "He passes eight months of the year there." "And the rest?" "At Paris, I believe." "Does he see company?" "The townsmen of Bruyers, and sometimes our old folks: who go to eat his soup, and to chatter with him." "And does he bring anybody from Paris?" "Nobody but his daughter." "He is very much in the right! And how does he employ himself?" "In judging us, reconciling us, marrying our children, maintaining peace in our families, and assisting them when the seasons are bad." "I will go," said Alcestes, "to see his village: it must be moving."

He was surprised to find the roads, even the cross-roads, bordered with hedges and kept with care; but having met people busied in keeping them even, "Ah," said he, "there are the statute-labourers." "Statute-labourers!" replied an old man, who presided over these works; "we know none such here; these people are paid; nobody is constrained. Only if there come to the village a vagabond, an idle fellow, I am sent to him; and if he wants bread he earns it, or he goes to seek it elsewhere." "And who has established this happy policy?" "Our good lord, the father to us all." "And the funds for this expense, who provides them?" "The community; and as she imposes them herself, it comes not to pass, as is seen elsewhere, that the rich are exempted at the charge of the poor."

Alcestes redoubled his esteem for the wise and beneficent man, who governed this little people. "How powerful would a king be," said he, "and a state how happy, if all the great proprietors of lands would follow the example of this nobleman? But Paris absorbs both the wealth and the men; it strips, it carries away everything."

The first glance of the village presented him with the image of ease and health. He enters into a plain and large building, which was to appearance a public edifice, and there he finds a multitude of children, women, and old men, employed in useful labours. Idleness was not permitted, excepting to the last weakness. Infancy, almost at its issuing from the cradle, acquired the habit and relish of labour; and old age, at the brink of the grave, still exercised

its trembling hands. The season in which the earth rests, assembled to the workhouse the vigorous men; and then the shuttle, the saw, and the hatchet gave a new value to the productions of nature. "I am not surprised," said Alcestes, "that these people should be exempt from vice and want. They are laborious, and perpetually employed." He enquired how the workhouse had been established. "Our good lord," said they to him, "advanced the money. It was but a small matter at first; and all was done at his risk, at his expense, and his profit; but after being well assured that it was advantageous, he gave up the undertaking to us: he interferes no longer except in protecting it; and every year he gives to the village the tools of some one of our arts; it is the present he makes at the first wedding that is celebrated in the year."—"I must see this man," said Alcestes: "his character pleases me."

He advances into the village, and he observes a house into which the people are going and coming with uneasiness. He demands the cause of these movements; they tell him that the head of the family is at the point of death. He enters, and sees an old man, who with an expiring, but serene eye, seems to bid adieu to his children, who melt into tears around him. He distinguishes, in the midst of the crowd, a person moved, but less afflicted, who encourages and consoles them. By his plain and grave dress, he takes him for the physician of the village. "Sir," said he to him, "be not surprised at seeing here a stranger. It is not an idle curiosity that brings me hither. These good people may have need of assistance at so melancholy a juncture; and I come——" "Sir," said the viscount to him, "my peasants thank you: I hope as long as I live they will have need of nobody, and if money could prolong the days of a good man, this worthy father of a family should be restored to his children."—"Ah, sir," said Alcestes, on discovering Monsieur De Laval by his talk, "pardon an uneasiness which I ought not to have had."—"I am not offended," replied M. De Laval, "that a good deed should be disputed with me; but may I know who you are, and what brings you here?" At the name of Alcestes he recollected that censor of human nature, whose rigour was so well known; but without being intimidated, "Sir," said he, "I am very glad to have you in my neighbourhood, and if I can be of service to you in anything, I beg you to command me."

Alcestes went to visit M. De Laval, and was received by him with that plain and serious gentility, which proclaims neither the want nor the desire of being connected. "There, now," said he, "is a man of some reserve. I like him the better for it." He

felicitated M. De Laval on the pleasures of his solitude. "You come to live here," said he, "far from mankind, and you are very much in the right to fly from them."—"I, sir," I do not fly from mankind. I have neither the weakness to fear them, the pride to despise them, nor the misfortune to hate them." This answer came so home, that Alcestes was disconcerted at it. But he would support what he set out with, and he began the satire of the world. "I have lived in the world as well as others," said M. De Laval, "and I have not found it so wicked. There are vices and virtues in it, good and evil, I confess: but nature is so compounded, we must know how to accommodate ourselves to it." "Ay, but," said Alcestes, "in that compound, the good is very small, and the evil so predominant, that the latter choaks up the former."—"Ah, sir," replied the viscount, "if we were as strongly fired with the good as with the evil, if we used the same warmth in publishing it, and good examples were posted up as bad ones are, can you doubt but that the good ones would carry it on the balance? But gratitude speaks so low, and complaint declaims so loud, that we only hear the latter. Esteem and friendship are commonly moderate in their commendations; they imitate the modesty of the virtuous in praising them: whereas resentment and injury exaggerate everything to excess. Thus we see not the good but through a medium which lessens it, and we view the evil through a vapour which magnifies it."

"Sir," said Alcestes to the viscount, "you make me wish to think like you, and though I might have on my side the melancholy truth, your mistake would be preferable."—"Why, yes, without doubt, fretfulness is of no service. A fine part for a man to play, to be out of humour like a child, and get into a corner to pout at all the world! and why? For the bickerings of the circle in which we live; as if all nature were an accomplice and responsible for the injuries at which we are hurt!"—"You are right," said Alcestes. "It would be unjust to render man a solitary animal; but how many griefs have we not to reproach them with in common? Believe me, sir, my prejudice has serious and weighty motives. You will do me justice when you know me. Permit me to see you often."—"Often, that is difficult," said the viscount; "my time is very much taken up; and my daughter and I have our studies, which leave us little leisure; but sometimes, if you please, we will enjoy our neighbourhood at our ease, and without laying any constraint on each other; for the privilege of the country is to have it in our power to be alone when we have a mind."

"This man is rare in his species," said Alcestes on going away.

"And his daughter, who listened to us with the air of so tender a veneration for her father; this daughter, brought up under his eye, accustomed to a plain life, pure manners, and pleasures that are innocent, will be an estimable woman, or I am very much mistaken—at least," resumed he, "unless they lead her astray in that Paris, where everything is ruined."

If we were to represent to ourselves delicacy and sentiment personified, we should have the idea of Ursula's beauty. (It was thus that *Mademoiselle De Laval* was called). Her figure was such as imagination gives to the Graces. She was eighteen years complete; and by the freshness and regularity of her charms, one might see that nature had just put the last hand to her. Her voice and mouth were of that kind which embellish everything. Nothing could be more simple than her attire, and nothing more elegant. The misanthrope had found in her the genteest air, and the most decent conversation. "It would be a pity," said he, "that she should fall into bad hands; she might make an accomplished woman. Indeed, the more I think of it, the more I congratulate myself in having her father for a neighbour; he is an upright man, a gallant man."

Some days after, *M. De Laval* in walking out returned his visit; and *Alcestes* talked to him of the pleasure which he must have in making people happy. "It is a fine example," added he, "and, to the shame of mankind, a pretty rare one! How many folks, richer and more powerful than you, are only a burden to the people!"—"I neither excuse them nor blame them," replied *M. De Laval*. "To do good, there must be the power; and when we can, we ought to know how to seize it. But think not that it is so easy to affect it. It is not sufficient to be dexterous enough; we must also be happy enough; we must know how to treat just, sensible, docile minds; and frequently a great deal of address and patience is necessary to lead on a people, naturally diffident and fearful, to what is advantageous to them."—"Truly," said *Alcestes*, "it is the excuse which they make; but do you think it a very solid one? And the obstacles which you have overcome, cannot they also conquer them?"—"I have been," said *M. De Laval*, "solicited by opportunity, and seconded by circumstances. This people, newly conquered, thought themselves undone without resource, and the moment that I held open my arms to them, their despair made them rush into them. At the mercy of an arbitrary impost, they had conceived so much terror, that they chose rather to endure their vexation than to show a little ease. On my arrival here, I found established this distressing and destructive maxim to the country: The more we labour the more

we shall be trampled upon. I went back to the source of the evil; I addressed myself to the man appointed to collect the tribute—‘Sir,’ said I to him, ‘my vassals groan under the burdens of constraint: I would wish to hear no more of it. Let us see what they owe yet of the year’s impost; I am come to acquit them.’ ‘Sir,’ replied the receiver to me, ‘that cannot be.’ ‘Why so?’ said I. ‘It is not the rule.’ ‘How! not the rule to pay the king the tribute which he demands? to pay it him with the least expense possible, and with the least delay?’ ‘Yes,’ said he, ‘that is the king’s interest; but mine? What would become of me, if it were to be paid down? The expenses are the perquisites of my office.’ To so good a reason I had no reply; and without insisting further, went to see the intendant——. ‘I beg two favours of you,’ said I to him: ‘one, that I may be permitted every year to pay the tribute for my vassals: the other, that their district may experience only the variations of the public tax.’ I obtained what I asked.

“‘Friends,’ said I to my peasants, whom I assembled at my arrival, ‘I now give you notice that it is into my hands you are to deposit for the future the just tribute which you owe to the king. No more vexations, no more expense. Every Sunday, at the parish bank, your wives shall bring their savings, and you will be insensibly cleared. Labour, cultivate your estates, increase their value to a hundred-fold; may the ground enrich you: you shall not be charged the more for it; I, your father, will be answerable to you for it. Those who shall be deficient, I will assist; and a few days of the dead season of the year employed on my works will reimburse me what I advance.’

“This plan was approved, and we have followed it. Our farmers’ wives never fail to bring me their little offering. On receiving it, I encourage them; I tell them of our good king; they go away with tears in their eyes: thus I make an act of love of what they looked upon, before my time, as an act of servitude.

“The statute-works had their turn, and the intendant, who detested them, but knew not how to remedy them, was enchanted at the method which I had taken to exempt my village from them.

“Lastly, as there was here a great deal of superfluous time, and useless hands, I established the workhouse, which you may have seen. It is the property of the community: they administer it under their own eyes; every one works there; but that labour is not sufficiently paid to divert them from working in the fields. The husbandman employs in it only the time which would otherwise be lost. The profit which they draw from it forms a fund which is employed in contributing to the militia, and to the

expenses of public works. But an advantage more precious still, from this establishment, is to have increased the human race. When children are a charge, we get no more than we are able to maintain; but from the moment that, at their issue from the cradle, they are able to provide for their own subsistence, nature delivers herself up to her attraction, without reserve or uneasiness. We seek the means of population; there is but one; the subsistence, the employment of mankind. As they are born only to live, we must insure them a livelihood at their birth."

"Nothing wiser than your principles, nothing more virtuous than your cares; but confess," replied the misanthrope, "that this good, important as it is, is not so difficult as to discourage those who love it; and that if they were men like you—"—"Say, rather, if they were so situated. I have had circumstances in my favour, and everything depends upon that. We see what is right; we love it; we wish to effect it; but obstacles arise on every step we take. There needs but one to prevent it; and instead of one, there arise a thousand. I was here very much at my ease; not a man of credit had an interest in the evil which I meant to destroy; and how little would have been sufficient to prevent my being able to remedy it! Suppose, instead of a tractable intendant, I had been under the necessity of seeing, persuading, prevailing on an absolute man, jealous of his power, entirely led by his own opinions, or swayed by the counsels of his subaltern officers. Nothing of all this scheme could have taken place: they would have told me not to busy myself, but to let things of this kind alone. Thus it is that good-will often remains useless on the part of the rich. I know that you do not suspect it; but there is in your prejudices more caprice than you imagine."

Alceste, touched to the quick by this reproach, from a man whose esteem was to him of so great value, endeavoured to justify himself. He told him of the law-suit he had lost, of the coquette who had deceived him, and of all his subjects of complaint against human nature.

"Truly," said the viscount to him, "this was a mighty matter to make one uneasy! You go to choose among a thousand women a giddy creature, who amuses herself, and makes a fool of you, as it were, with reason; you take most seriously that love of which she makes a mere diversion: who is to blame? But granting her wrong, are all women like her? What! because there are knaves among the men, are you and I the less honest on that account? In the individual, who hurts you, you hate the species! There is caprice, neighbour; there is caprice in this, you must agree.

"You have lost a cause which you thought just; but does not

a suitor, who is a person of integrity, always think that he has a good cause? Are you alone more disinterested, more infallible, than your judges? And if they have wanted lights, are they criminal for that? I, sir, when I see men devote themselves to a state of life which has many troubles in it, and very few pleasures; which imposes on their manners all the constraint of the most severe decorum, which requires an unremitted application, a steady recollection, a labour without any salary, where virtue herself is almost without lustre; when I see them, environed with the luxury and pleasures of an opulent city, live retired, solitary, in the frugality, simplicity, and modesty of the first ages, I consider as a sacrifice the reproach of their equity. Now, such is the life of the greater part of the judges whom you accuse upon such slight foundations. It is not some giddy persons, whom you see fluttering in the world, that hold the balance of the laws. Till such time as they become more prudent, they have at least the modesty to be silent before consummate judges. The latter are sometimes mistaken, without doubt, because they are not angels; but they are less of men than you and I; and I will never be persuaded that a venerable old man, who at the break of day drags himself to the hall with a tottering pace, goes there to commit injustice.

“With regard to the court, there are so many interests in it, so complicated, and so powerful, which thwart and oppose each other, that it is natural that men should there be more delivered up to their passions, and more wicked than elsewhere. But neither you nor I have passed through these great trials of ambition and envy; and it has depended, perhaps, on but a trifle, that we have not been, as well as others, false friends and base flatterers. Believe me, sir, few people have a right to settle the police of the world.”

“All honest men have that right,” said Alcestes, “and if they would league themselves together, the wicked would not have so much audaciousness and credit in the world.”—“When that league is formed,” said M. De Laval, going away, “we will both enrol ourselves in it. Till then, neighbour, I advise you to do without noise, in your little corner, the utmost good you can, by taking for a rule the love of mankind, and in reserving your hatred for a few sad exceptions.”

“It is a very great pity,” said Alcestes, when M. De Laval was gone, “that goodness should be always accompanied with weakness, while wickedness has so much strength and vigour!”—“It is a very great pity,” said M. De Laval, “that this honest man has taken a bias, which renders him useless to himself and others!

He has uprightness, he loves virtue; but virtue is but a chimera without the love of human nature. Thus both, judging each other, were displeased with one another."

An incident, pretty singular, rendered Alcestes still less at his ease with M. De Laval. The Baron of Blonzac, a right Gascon, a man of honour, but haughty, and a misanthrope in his manner, had married the Canoness of Remiremont, a relation of the viscount. His garrison was in Lorraine. He came to see M. De Laval; and whether it was to amuse himself, or to correct two misanthropes by means of each other, M. De Laval wanted to set them by the ears. He sent to invite Alcestes to dinner.

Among men, table-talk turns pretty often upon politics; and the Gascon, from the moment they had dined, began laying on, and drinking at a great rate. "I make no point of concealing," said he, "I have taken an aversion to the world. It is full of whores and knaves; it is the age of favourites; intrigue and favour have done their parts, and have forgot nothing but merit. Myself, for example, who have never known but to march where honour calls, and to fight as becomes a soldier, I am known by the enemy; but may the devil take me if either the ministry, or the court, know that I exist! If they were to hear any mention of me, they would take me for one of my grandfathers; and if they should be told that a cannon-ball had taken off my head, I will lay a wager they would ask if there were any more Blonzacs. "Why do you not show yourself?" said M. De Laval to him. "There is no necessity to let one's-self be forgot." "Why, my lord, I show myself in the day of battle. Is it at Paris that the colours are flying?"

In the midst of this talk, letters were brought M. De Laval from Paris. He asks leave to read them, "In order to know," said he, "if there be anything new:" and one of his letters informs him that the command of the citadel, which he solicited for M. De Blonzac, without his knowledge, had just been granted him. "Hold," said he to him, "there now is one who regards you." Blonzac read, leaped with joy, and ran to embrace the viscount; but after the sally he had made, he durst not mention what had happened to him. Alcestes, believing he had found in him a second, did not fail in urging him. "There," said he, "there now is an example of those acts of injustice which shock me; a man of birth, a good soldier, after having served the state, remains forgotten, unrewarded; and let them tell me now, that all goes well." "Why," replied Blonzac, "we must be just! everything goes not so ill as is said. Rewards are to be waited for a little; but they come in time. It is not the fault of the ministry, if more

services are performed than there are rewards to be bestowed; and, in fact, they do what they can." Alcestes was a little surprised at this change of language, and the apologetical tone which Blonzac assumed during the rest of the entertainment. "Come," said the viscount, "in order to reconcile you, let us drink the commandant's health;" and he published what he had just learned. "I ask the gentleman's pardon," said Alcestes, "for having dwelt on his complaints; I did not know the reasons which he had to retract them." "I!" said Blonzac, "I have no animosity, and I come to, like a child." "You see," resumed M. De Laval, "that a misanthrope is to be brought back to reason." "Yes," replied Alcestes, "when he regulates his sentiments on his own personal interest." "Ah, sir," said Blonzac, "do you know any one who is warm for what touches him neither nearly nor at a distance?"—"Everything that concerns humanity," replied Alcestes, "touches a good man nearly; and doubt not but there are friends enough of the order, to hate the evil as evil, without any respect to themselves."—"I will believe it," replied the Gascon, "when I see any one uneasy at what passes in China; but as long as people are afflicted only at the hurt which they feel themselves, or which they may feel, I shall believe that they think only of themselves, while they have the air of being taken up with the thought of others. As for me, I am sincere: I never give myself up as an advocate for the discontented. Let every one plead his own cause. I complained while I had reason to complain; I now make my peace with the world, as soon as I have reason to be satisfied with it."

As much as the scene with Blonzac disturbed Alcestes, so much did it rejoice M. De Laval and his daughter. "There," said they, "has our misanthrope received a good lesson."

Whether it was shame or policy, he was some days without seeing them. He came again, however, one afternoon. The viscount was gone to the village: Mademoiselle De Laval received him; and on seeing himself alone with her, a transport seized him, which he had some difficulty to conceal.

"We have not had the honour of seeing you," said she to him, "since M. D. Blonzac's visit; what say you to that gentleman?"—"Why, he is a man like the rest."—"Not so much like the rest: he speaks with an open heart; he says what others conceal; and that frankness makes him, in my opinion, a pretty singular character."—"Yes, Mademoiselle, frankness is rare; and I am very glad to see that at your age you are convinced of it. You will often have occasion to recollect it, I promise you. Ah, in what a world you are going to fall! My lord excuses it in the best manner he is able; his own beautiful soul does the rest of mankind

the honour to judge of them according to itself; but if you knew how dangerous and hateful the greater part are!"—"You for example," said Ursula, smiling; "you have very great reason to complain of it; is it not true?"—"Spare me, I pray you, and attribute not to me the personalities of M. De Blonzac. I think as he does in certain respects; but our motives are not the same."—"I believe it; but explain to me what I am not able to conceive. Vice and virtue, I have been told, are nothing more than relative terms. The one is vice, because it hurts mankind; the other virtue, on account of the good it occasions."—"Exactly so."—"To hate vice, to love virtue, is therefore only to interest ourselves in the welfare of mankind; and in order to interest ourselves we must love them. For how can you at once interest yourself and hate them?"—"I interest myself in the welfare of the good, whom I love, and I detest the wicked who hurt them; but the good are so very few in number, and the world is so full of bad people."—"See there, now. Your hatred at least extends not to all mankind. But do you think that those whom you love are everywhere so few in number? Let us make a voyage together in idea. Do you agree to it?"—"With all my heart."—"First, in the country, are you not persuaded that there are morals; and if not virtues, at least simplicity, goodness, innocence?" "There is also commonly distrust and craft." "Alas! I can easily conceive what my father has said more than once: craft and distrust are the consequences of weakness. We find them in the villagers, as in women and children. They have everything to fear; they escape, they defend themselves as well as they can; and we observe the same instinct in most animals." "Yes," said Alcestes, "and that very circumstance forms the satyr of the cruel, rapacious animals which they have to guard against." "I understand you; but we are now speaking only of the country people, and you will agree with me, that they are more worthy of pity than of hatred." "Oh, I agree." "Let us pass to the cities, and take Paris for example." "My God! what an example you choose." "Very well; even in that same Paris, the common people are good; my father frequents them; he goes often into those obscure recesses, where poor families, crowded together, groan in want; he says that he finds there a modesty, patience, and honesty, and sometimes even a nobleness of thinking, which moves and astonishes him." "And this it is which ought to set us against un pitying the world, which forsakes suffering virtue, and pays respect to successful and insolent vice." "Not so fast: we are at the common people. Agree that, in general, they are good, docile, courteous, honest, and that their own sincerity gives them

a confidence which is very often abused." "O, very often!" "You love the common people, then. And in all places the common people form the greater number."

"Not everywhere."

"We are speaking only of our own country: it is with that which I would reconcile you at present. Now let us come to the great folks; and tell me, first, if my father has imposed on me in it, when he has painted the manners of the women." 'As their duties,' said he, 'are included in the interior of a private life, their virtues have nothing dazzling: it is only their vices that are conspicuous; and the folly of one woman makes more noise than the discretion of a thousand. Thus the evil rises in evidence, and the good remains buried.' My father adds, that one moment of weakness, one imprudence, ruins a woman, and that this blemish has sometimes tarnished a thousand excellent qualities. He confesses, in short, that the vice which we most reproach women with, and which does them the most injury, hurts only themselves, and that there is no reason for hating them. For the rest, what is it that you reproach us with? A little falsehood? But that is all by agreement. Instructed from our infancy to please you, we have no other care but to conceal what will not please you. If we disguise ourselves, it is only under those charms which you love better than our own. And do you know that nothing is more humiliating to us? I am young, but I can easily perceive that the most beautiful act of our freedom is to show ourselves such as we are; but to disguise one's soul, and to disavow one's self, is of all the acts of servitude the most degrading. This is what I find a woman a slave in; and it is a yoke which has been imposed on us."

"If all women thought as nobly as you do, beautiful Ursula, they would not so lightly, and in gaiety of heart, make a mere pastime of deceiving us."

"If they deceive you, it is your own fault. You are our kings: convince us that you love nothing so much as truth, that truth alone pleases and touches you, and we will tell it you always. What is the ambition of a women? To be lovely, and to be loved. Very well, write on the apple, *To the most sincere*; they will all dispute it with each other in unaffected simplicity. But you have written, *To the most seducing*; and each tries who shall seduce you the best. As for our jealousies, our little animosities, our tattlings, our bickerings; all these things are only amusing to you, and you will agree that your wars are of a very different consequence."

"You are a proof of it," said Alcestes to her, "you, whose soul is so much above your sex and your age."—"I am young," replied

Ursula, "and I have a right to your indulgence; but the question is not concerning me; it is the world which you fly, which you abandon, without well knowing why. I have attempted the defence of the women; I leave to my father the care of accomplishing that of the men: but I tell you before hand, that in giving me the picture of their society, he has often told me, that there were almost as few perverse minds as there are heroic souls, and that the majority was composed of weak, harmless people, who required nothing but peace and quiet."

"Yes, peace and quiet, but it is every one for himself, and at the expense of the person to whom it belongs. The world, Mademoiselle, is composed only of dupes and knaves: now, nobody would be a dupe; and to speak only what concerns yourself, I must tell you, that all the idle people there are at Paris of an age to please, are employed morning and evening in nothing else but in laying snares for the women."

"Good!" said Ursula, "they know it; and my father is persuaded that this contest of gallantry on the one side, and coquetry on the other, is nothing but a diversion, in which both are agreed."

"You think so?"

"I am so thoroughly persuaded of it, that if ever I commit an indiscretion, I declare to you before hand, it will be because I shall have liked it."

"Without doubt they like it; but they only like it when seduced by an enchanter who makes you like it."

"That also is an excuse which at present I renounce; I have no faith in enchantments."

They were got so far when Monsieur De Laval arrived from his walk. "What say you to Alcestes?" continued Ursula. "He would have me tremble at being exposed in the world to the seduction of the men."

"Why," said the father, "we must not be too confident; I do not think thee infallible."

"No, but you shall be my guard; and if you lose sight of me, you know what you have promised me."

"I will endeavour to keep my word."

"May I be in the secret?" demanded Alcestes, with a timid air.

"There's no secret in it," replied Ursula: "my father has had the goodness to instruct me in my duties; and if he could guide me perpetually, I should be very sure of not going astray. If I forgot myself, he would not forget me; accustomed to read my soul, he would regulate all its motions; but as he will not always have his eyes upon me, he has promised me another guide, a husband,

which may be his friend and mine, and who shall supply the place of a father."

"Add also, and of a lover; for a young woman must surely have love. I would have you discreet, but I would likewise have you be happy; and if I had the imprudence to give you a husband who did not love you, or knew not how to please you, I should no longer have the right of taking it, that the desire of enjoying the greatest of felicities, that of loving and being loved, should make you forget my lessons."

Alcestes went away, charmed at the wisdom of so good a father and more still with the candour and honesty of the daughter. "A distinction has been," said he, "between the age of innocence and reason; but in her happy disposition, innocence and reason unite. Her soul purifies, at the same time that it enlightens itself. Ah! if there were a man worthy of cultivating gifts so precious, what a source of delicious enjoyments to him! There is nothing but this world, filled with shoals, from which it is necessary to keep her at a distance. But if she loved, what would it be to her? A virtuous and tender husband would suffice her, would be to her instead of everything. I dare believe, that at twenty-five I was the man who suited her——At twenty-five? and what did I know then? To amuse myself, and run into dissipation? Was I capable of filling the place of a wise and vigilant father? I should have loved her to distraction; but what confidence should I have inspired into her? It is not, perhaps, too much yet to have fifteen years more experience. But from eighteen to forty the interval must be frightful to her. There is no thinking of it."

He thought of it, however, all night long; the next day he did nothing else; and the day following, the first idea which presented itself to him was that of his amiable Ursula. "Ah, what a pity," said he, "what a pity if she were to take to the vices of the world! her soul is as pure as her beauty. What sweetness in her temper! what touching simplicity in her manners and language! They talk of eloquence; is there any truer? It was impossible for her to convince me; but she has persuaded me. I have desired to think like her; I could have wished that the illusion which she spread before me were never dissipated. Why have I not over her, or rather over her father, that soft empire which she has over me? I would engage them to live here, in the simplicity of nature. And what need should we have of the world? Ah! three hearts thoroughly united, two lovers and a father—have they not, in the intimacy of a mutual tenderness, sufficient to render themselves fully happy?"

In the evening, when walking out, his steps turned, as it were, of themselves, towards M. De Laval's gardens. He found him there, with the pruning knife in his hand, amidst his espaliers. "Confess," said he to him, "that these tranquil pleasures are well worth those noisy ones which people like, or think they like, at Paris."

"Everything has its season," replied the viscount. "I love the country while it is alive: I am useless at Paris, and my village has need of me; I enjoy myself there, and the good which I do; my daughter is pleased and amused there; this is what attracts and retains me. But think not that I live there alone. Our little town of Bruyeres is full of honest people, who love and cultivate letters. There is no part of the world where the inhabitants have gentler manners. They are polite with freedom; plain, yet informed. Candour, uprightness, and gaiety are the character of that amiable people: they are social, humane, beneficent. Hospitality is a virtue which the father transmits to his son. The women are sprightly and virtuous; and society, embellished by them, unites the charms of decency to the pleasures of liberty. But in enjoying so sweet a commerce, I cease not still to love Paris; and if friendship, the love of letters, connections which I hold dear, did not recall me there, the attraction of variety alone would carry me back every year. The most lively pleasures languish at last, and the sweetest become insipid to him who knows not how to vary them."—"I can conceive, however," said the misanthrope, "that a society, not numerous, intimately connected with ease and truth, might supply everything to itself; and if an offer, agreeable to Mademoiselle De Laval, had no other inconvenience in it than that of fixing her in the country, I am persuaded that you yourself——."—"Why truly," said M. De Laval, "if my daughter could be happy there, I should make her happiness mine: that is most certain. It is now fifty years since I have lived for myself; it is high time now that I should live for her. But we are not come to that. My daughter loves Paris, and I am rich enough to settle her there decently."

This was enough for Alcestes; and for fear of discovering himself, he turned the conversation to gardening, by asking M. De Laval if he did not cultivate flowers? "They pass away too soon," replied the viscount. "The pleasure and regret of them border so nearly on each other, and the idea of destruction intermingles I know not what of melancholy in the sentiment of enjoyment. In a word, I feel more chagrin in seeing a rose-bush stripped, than joy on seeing it flourish. The culture of kitchen herbs has an interest more gradual, more supported, and, to say

the truth, more satisfactory; for it terminates in the useful. While art exercises and fatigues itself in varying the scenes of a flower garden, nature herself changes the decorations of a kitchen garden. How many metamorphoses, for example, have these peach-trees experienced, from the very budding of their leaves to the full maturity of their fruits! Talk to me, neighbour, of lasting pleasures; those which, like flowers, endure but a day, cost too much to renew."

Master of the father's temper, Alcestes wanted to inform himself of that of the daughter, and it was easy for him to have a private conversation with her. "The more I penetrate," said he to her, "into your father's heart, the more I admire and love him."

"So much the better," said Ursula; "his examples will soften your manners; he will no doubt reconcile you with those like him."

"Like him! Ah, how few are there of them! It is to him, without doubt, a favour from Heaven to have a daughter like you, beautiful Ursula; but it is a happiness as rare to have a father like him. May the husband which the Almighty destines you, be worthy both of one and the other!"—"Pray to Heaven," said she, smiling, "that he be not an misanthrope! Men of that caste are too difficult to correct."—"Would you like better," said Alcestes, "one of those cold and trifling men, whom everything amuses, and nothing interests; one of those weak and easy men, whom the mode bends and fashions to her own taste; who are wax, with respect to the manners of the time, and to whom custom is the supreme law? A misanthrope loves but few; but when he loves, he loves truly."

"Yes, I very clearly perceive that such a conquest is flattering to vanity; but I am plain, and not vain. I would not find in a heart devoted to me asperity or moroseness; I would wish to be able to communicate to it the softness of my own temper, and that sentiment of universal benevolence, which makes me see men and things on the most comfortable side. I could not spend my life in loving a man who would constantly pass his in hatred."

"That is not civil, for they accuse me of being an misanthrope."

"Why, it is from you, and you alone, that I have taken the idea of that character: for M. De Blonzac's humour was nothing but a fit of the pouts; and you have seen how small a matter could bring him to himself again; but a hatred of mankind, arising from reflection and founded on principles, is horrible; and this is what you profess. I am persuaded that your aversion for

the world is nothing but whim, an excess of virtue: you are not wicked, you are only rigid; and I believe you as little indulgent to yourself as to another; but this too severe and impatient probity renders you unsociable; and you must confess that a husband of that temper would not be entertaining."—"You would have a husband entertain you, then?"—"And entertain himself," replied she; "with the same things as me; for if marriage be a participation of cares, it ought, in return, to be a society of pleasures.

"Nothing clearer," said Alcestes to himself, after their conversation: "she could not have told me her thoughts more plainly, though she had divined mine. This is for me and my comrades a discharge before hand. And what am I thinking of? I am forty years, free and easy; it depends on myself only to be happy. Happy! And can I be so alone, with a soul so sensible? I fly the men! Ah! it was the women, the handsome women, whom I ought to have flown. I thought I knew them sufficiently to have no more to fear from them; but who could have expected what has happened to me? I must, to my misfortune, in the corner of a province, find beauty, youth, graces, wisdom, virtue herself, united in one and the same object. It seems as if love pursued me, and that he had purposely made this dear girl to distress me. And what a way she takes to trouble my repose? I detest airs; nothing more simple than she. I despise coquetry; she thinks not even of pleasing. I love, I adore candour! her soul shows itself quite naked. She tells me to my face the most cruel truths: what would she do more, if she had resolved to turn my brain? She is very young; she will change: launched into the world which she loves, she will soon assume the manners of it; and it is to be believed that she will at last be a woman like the rest. To be believed! Ah! I do not believe it, and if I believed it, I should be too unjust. She will be the happiness and glory of her husband, if he be worthy of her. And I, I shall live alone, detached from everything, in a state of solitude and annihilation; for it must be confessed, the soul is annihilated as soon as it loves nothing any longer. What do I say? Alas! if I loved no longer, would that repose, that sleep of the soul, be frightful to me? Flattering idea of a greater happiness! It is thou, thou that makest me perceive the void and dulness of myself. Ah, to cherish my solitude for ever, I should never have gone out of it!"

These reflections and these struggles plunged him into melancholy, which he thought it his duty to bury. Eight days having rolled away, the viscount, surprised at not seeing him again, sent

so know if he was sick. Alcestes returned for answer, that in fact he had not been well for some time past. The sensible soul of Ursula was affected at this answer. She had entertained, since his absence, some suspicion of the truth; she was now the more persuaded of it, and reproached herself for having afflicted him. "Let us go and see him," said the viscount; "his condition moves my pity. Ah, daughter, what a gloomy and painful resolution is that of living alone, and of being sufficient to one's self! Man is too weak to support it."

When Alcestes saw, for the first time, Mademoiselle De Laval enter his house, it seemed as if his habitation had transformed itself into a temple. He was seized with joy and respect; but the impression of melancholy still made an alteration on his features.

"What is the matter, Alcestes?" said M. De Laval to him. "I find you afflicted; and you lay hold of that moment to fly me. Do you think us some of those people who do not love sorrowful countenances, and who must always be accosted with a laugh? When you are easy and happy, keep at home; very well: but when you have any grief, come to me, either to pity or console you."

Alcestes listened, and admired in silence.

"Yes," said he, "I am struck with a thought which pursues and afflicts me: I would not, and I ought not to conceal it from you. Heaven is my witness, that after having renounced the world, I regretted nothing when I knew you. Since I perceive that I deliver myself up to the pleasure of your company; that my soul is attached to you by all the ties of esteem and friendship; and that when they must be broken, alas! perhaps for ever, this retreat, which I should have cherished, will be my grave. My resolution, therefore, is taken, not to wait till the charms of so sweet a connection render the solitude in which I am to live odious; and in revering you, in loving both the one and the other, as two beings by which nature is to procure honour to herself, and of which the world is not worthy, I beg you to permit me to bid you an eternal farewell." Then taking the viscount's hands, and kissing them respectfully, he watered them with his tears. "I will see you no more, sir," added he, "but I will hold you dear for ever."

"Nonsense," said M. De Laval to him: "and who hinders us to live together, if you like my acquaintance? You have taken an aversion to the world: a mere whim; but no matter; I know you have a good heart; and though our tempers may not be the same, I see nothing incompatible in them; and perhaps they resemble each other more than you imagine. Why then take a resolution

which afflicts you, and which would afflict me? You think with sorrow on the moment of our separation: it depends only on yourself to follow us. Nothing more easy than to live at Paris, free, solitary, and detached from the world. My company is not tumultuous: it shall be yours; and I promise you, I will not force you to see any but such as you shall esteem.”—“Your goodness penetrates me,” said Alcestes; “and I know what I owe to such kindness.”

“Nothing in it,” replied the viscount; “such as you are, you suit me. I esteem you, I pity you; and if I deliver you up to your own melancholy, you are a lost man: that would be a pity; and the condition which you are in permits me to abandon you. In a month I quit the country: I have a room for you; and, whether under the title of friendship or gratitude, I insist on your accepting it.”

“Ah!” said Alcestes, “that it were possible!”

“Have you,” demanded the viscount, “any obstacle? If your fortune were out of order, I flatter myself that you are not the man to blush at confessing it.”—“No,” said Alcestes, “I am richer than a single person had need to be. I have ten thousand crowns a-year, and owe nothing. But a more serious motive retains me here: you shall judge of it.”—“Come and sup with us, then, and I will disperse all those clouds if I can. You make a hydra,” said he to Alcestes, on the road, “of the vice and wickedness you have seen in the world. Would you try now, to what a small number this class of men who terrify you are reduced; make out a list of them with me this evening, and I defy you to name a hundred persons whom you have a right to hate.”

“O Heaven! I could name a thousand.”

“We’ll see. Remember only to be just, and to establish your complaints well.”

“Nay, it is not on particular facts that I judge them, but by the gross of their manners. For example: it is pride which I condemn in some, meanness in others. I object to them the abuse of riches, of credit, of authority, an exclusive love of themselves, a cruel insensibility to the misfortunes and wants of others; and although these vices, in every stage of life, have not features sufficiently marked, formally to exclude a man from the number of honest people, yet they authorize me to banish him from the number of those whom I esteem and love.” From the instant that we talk in general,” said the viscount, “we declaim as much as we please; but we render ourselves liable to be unjust. Our esteem is a possession of which we are but the depositaries, and which appertains of right to him who deserves it. Our contempt is a punishment which it

depends on us to inflict, but not according to our caprice; and every one of us, in judging of his fellow, owes him the examination which he would require, if it were himself to be judged; for, in regard to manners, public censure is a tribunal where we all sit, but to which we are also all cited. Now, who of us consents that we should be accused there on vague presumptions, and to be condemned without proofs? Consult your own heart, and see in yourself whether you duly observe the first of all laws?"

Alcestes walked with his eyes cast down, and sighed deeply. "You have in your mind," said the viscount, "some deep wound which I do not probe. I only combat your opinions; and it is, perhaps, to your sensations that I ought to apply the remedy."

On these words, they arrive at the castle of Laval; and whether through penetration or delicacy, Ursula steals away and leaves them together.

"Sir," said Alcestes to the viscount, "I am now going to talk to you as to a friend of twenty years: your goodness engages me, and my duty obliges me to it. It is but too true that I must renounce what formed the consolation and the charm of my life, the pleasure of seeing you, and living with you. Another man would make use of circumlocution, and blush to break silence; but I see nothing in my misfortune which I ought to dissemble. I have not been able to see with indifference what nature has formed the most accomplished in its kind: I confess it to Ursula's father; and I beseech him to forget it after I have taken my leave."—"How," said the viscount, "is this the great secret? Very well, now we have it; you are in love: is there anything in that to make you unhappy?" "Ah! I would fain be so yet; and far from ashamed, I should glory in it." "Come, we must endeavour to please, to be very tender, very complaisant: we are still amiable at your age; perhaps you will be beloved." "Ah, sir, you do not understand me." "Pardon me; I believe I do. You are in love with Ursula?" "Alas! yes, sir."

"Very well; who hinders you from trying, at least, if so good a heart will be touched with the feelings of yours?"—"What, sir, do you authorise me?"—"Why not! Sure you think me very difficult! you have by inheritance a handsome fortune; and if my daughter consents, I do not see what can happen better. Alcestes fell, in amaze, at the viscount's knees. "Your goodness, sir, overpowers me!" said he; "but it is of no service to me. Mademoiselle De Laval has declared to me that a misanthrope was her aversion; and this is the idea she has formed of my character." "That does not signify: you will change." "I cannot dissemble." "You shall not; you shall reconcile yourself to mankind in good earnest,

You will not be the first bear that has been tamed by the women."

Supper being served up, they seated themselves at table; and never before was M. De Laval in so sprightly an humour. "Come, neighbour," said he, "cheer up, nothing sets us off like spirits." Alcestes, thus encouraged, took heart. He made the most touching eulogy on the intimate commerce of souls whom the relish of virtue, the love of truth, the sentiment of what is just and honest, unites. "What an attraction," said he, "have they for each other! With what effusion they communicate! What agreement, and what harmony they form in uniting! I find here but two that are like me; and they are a whole world to me. My soul is full; I could wish to be able to fix my existence in this delicious state, or that my life were a chain of incidents resembling this."—"I would lay a wager," replied the viscount, "that if Heaven were to take you at your word, you would be very sorry not to have asked more." "I confess it, and if I were worthy of forming yet one wish——"

"Did not I say so? Such is man. He has always somewhat to wish for. We are but three; and yet there is not one of us who does not wish for something. What say you, daughter? For my part, I confess I ask of Heaven, with ardour, a husband whom you may love, and who may render you happy."

"And you, Alcestes?"

"And I, if I durst, would ask to be that husband."

"There are now three wishes," said M. De Laval, "which might easily be made one."

I have already given some intimation that Ursula had conceived for Alcestes an esteem and good will: the trouble she had taken to soften his temper proclaimed it, but it was only in this instant that she perceived how sensibly that disposition, which we must either love or hate, had touched her.

"Hey!" said her father, after a long silence, "we are all three struck dumb! That Alcestes, at forty, should be confused at having made a declaration to a lady of eighteen, is natural enough; that Ursula should blush, look down, and observe a modest silence, is quite natural too; but I, who am but a mere confidant, why should I be grave? The scene is amusing."

"Sir," said Ursula, "spare me, I beseech you. Alcestes gives me a mark of esteem, of which I am very sensible: and he would be very angry that we should make a jest of it."—"Would you have me believe that he is in earnest!"—"I am sure of it, and I am obliged to him."

"You do not think so. Forty! A man of his temper."

"His temper should estrange him from all sorts of engagements, and he knows very well what I think of it."

"And his age!"

"That is another thing; and I beg you to forget age, when you choose me a husband."

"Ah, child, but you are so young!"

"For that reason, I have need of a husband who is not so."

"There is nothing, then, but this unfortunate misanthropy which you have to object to him: and I own that it is incompatible with your temper."

"And more still with the plan which I have formed to myself."

"And what is that plan?"

"That of nature: to live happily with my husband; to sacrifice my taste to him, if unluckily I have not his; to renounce all society, rather than deprive me of his, and not to take one step in the world without his counsel and consent. Judge, therefore, of what concern it is to me, that his wisdom should have nothing savage in it, and that he should be pleased with that world in which I hope to live with him."—"Whoever he be, Mademoiselle," replied Alcestes, "I dare answer, that he will be pleased wherever you are."

"My father," continued Ursula, "takes a pleasure in bringing together to his suppers a circle of genteel people, both of the city and court; I would wish my husband to be of all these suppers; I would have him in particular be agreeable."

"Animated with the desire of pleasing you, he will certainly do his best."

"I propose to myself to frequent the plays, the public walks."

"Alas! these were my only pleasures; there are none more innocent."

"Balls, too, are my passion; and I would have my husband carry me there."

"In mask; nothing is more easy." "In a mask, or without a mask, just as I like." "Right; that is a matter of indifference, as long as one is there with one's wife." "Nay, more, I would have him dance there."

"Very well, Mademoiselle, I will dance there," said Alcestes with transport, throwing himself at her feet.

"Nay," cried the viscount, "there is no resisting that; and since he consents to dance at a ball, he will do impossibilities for you."

"My lord, without doubt, thinks me extremely ridiculous, and he has just reason, but I must complete my being so."

Yes, Mademoiselle, you see at your feet a friend, a lover, and since you will have it so, a second father; a man, in short, who renounces life, if he is not to live for you."

Ursula enjoyed her triumph; but it was not the vain and foolish triumph of vanity. She restored to the world, and to himself, an honest, virtuous man, a really useful citizen, who but for her had been lost. Such was the conquest with which she was pleased; but her silence was her only consent. Her eyes, timidly cast on the ground dared not raise themselves to those of Alcestes; one of her hands only was suffered to drop into his, and the crimson of her beautiful cheeks expressed the transport and emotion of her heart.

"Hey!" said the father, "you are motionless and dumb: what will you say to him!"

"Whatever you please."

"What I please, is to see him happy, provided he make my daughter so."

"It is in his power: he is virtuous, he reveres you, and you love him."

"Let us embrace, then, my children. This has been a truly happy evening, and I forebode well of a marriage which is concluded as in the good old times. Take my advice, my friend," continued he, warmly; "be a man, and live with mankind. It is the intention of nature. She has given faults to us all, that nobody need be dispensed with being indulgent to the faults of others."



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